

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Reception in Old Greenwich, Connecticut January 29, 2004

Thank you all for coming. Thanks for coming. This is a huge crowd. I'm honored. I appreciate so many people being here tonight. I appreciate Debbie mentioning Yale. Some of my classmates from the mighty class of 1968 are here. They were the ones who invented shock and awe when they heard I was President. *[Laughter]* They're all fine lads. They themselves were C students. *[Laughter]* Vice President Cheney went to Yale. It just goes to show if you drop out, you can be the Vice President. *[Laughter]*

But I appreciate you coming. We're laying the foundation for what is going to be a great national victory in November of this year. I'm loosening up. *[Laughter]* And I'm getting ready. *[Laughter]* But politics is going to come in its own time. See, I've still got a job to do, and I want you to tell your friends and neighbors that my administration will continue to work hard to earn the confidence of every American by keeping this Nation strong and secure, prosperous and free.

I want to thank my cousin Debbie for finally doing something positive. *[Laughter]* No, I want to thank her. I love Debbie, and I want to thank her for her leadership for this event. She married my great friend Craig, the former Ambassador to the Czech Republic, who represented our Nation so well.

I'm not Debbie's favorite in my family. *[Laughter]* Laura is her favorite. *[Laughter]* And Laura was her first choice. *[Laughter]* She couldn't make it, but she sends her love. She's a fabulous First Lady for this country.

I want to thank Rick as well for your hard work, thank your team. You've done a fabulous job. It's important that you be well-funded if you're going to run a national campaign, so I want to thank you for your help. I also want to thank my

friend Mercer Reynolds. He's from Cincinnati, Ohio. He is the national chairman for the Bush-Cheney campaign, and he's doing a fabulous job on my behalf. Thank you for coming, Mercer. I appreciate you being here.

I want to thank your fine Congressman, Chris Shays, for his friendship and leadership. Somebody told me the funniest thing, that somebody is actually challenging Shays in this year. We need to send him back to Congress. He's doing a great job.

I want to thank you, Lieutenant Governor, for being here tonight, and all the State and local officials. I appreciate you coming. I'm counting on you. You need to organize and turn out that vote. And I appreciate your service to your State, and I appreciate what you're fixing to do for this campaign.

I want to thank—Debbie mentioned that we have some family in this neck of the woods. I remember coming to Grove Lane here in Greenwich to visit my grandfather and grandmother, two really fine, fine people. If you can't count on your family, it's hard to count on anybody in politics, so I'm really happy that some of my family has showed up tonight. *[Laughter]* I appreciate Uncle Jon and Uncle Pres—that's Jon Bush and Prescott Bush—and Jody and Beth. I'm honored that they're here and proud to be a member of their family with them.

I want to thank the political activists who are here, Herb Shephardson and Charlie Glazer and Jo McKenzie. Thank you all for coming. I want to thank all the grass-roots activists. These are the people who put up the signs, get on the phones, turn out the vote. These are the people who go to the community centers, places of worship, coffee shops, and you put out the word. I'm counting on you. You cannot win

a campaign without a good grassroots organization. So for those of you getting ready to get after this campaign, I want to thank you.

And when you're out there, you tell them this: You tell them, in the last 3 years our Nation has acted decisively to confront great challenges. I came to this office to solve problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. I came to seize opportunities instead of letting them slip away. My administration is meeting the tests of our time.

Terrorists declared war on the United States of America, and war is what they got. We have captured or killed many key leaders of the Al Qaida network. And the rest of them know—and the rest of them can be certain we're on their trail.

In Afghanistan and Iraq, we gave ultimatums to terror regimes. Those regimes chose defiance, and those regimes are no more. Fifty million people—50 million—in those 2 countries once lived under tyranny, and today they live in freedom.

Three years ago, our military was not receiving the resources it needed, and morale was beginning to suffer, so we increased the defense budgets to prepare for the threats of a new era. And today, no one in the world can question the skill and the strength and the spirit of the United States military.

Three years ago, the economy was in trouble, and a recession was beginning. And then attacks on our country and scandals in corporate America and war all affected the people's confidence. But we acted. We passed tough new laws to hold corporate criminals to account. And to get the economy going again, I have twice led the United States Congress to pass historic tax relief for the American people.

This administration understands that when Americans have more money to spend or save or invest, the whole economy grows, and people are more likely to find a job. So we're returning more money to the people to help them raise their families.

We're reducing taxes on dividends and capital gains to encourage investment. We've given small businesses incentives to expand and to hire new workers. With all these actions, we're laying the foundation for greater prosperity so that every single citizen has a chance to realize the American Dream.

This economy in America is strong, and it is getting stronger. The figures for third quarter of 2003 showed that the economy grew at the fastest rate in nearly 20 years. Productivity is high. Business investment is rising. Housing construction is expanding. Manufacturing activity is increasing. We've added over a quarter million new jobs. The tax relief we passed is working.

Three years ago, there was a lot of talk about education reform in Washington, but there wasn't much action. So I acted. I called for and the Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act. With a solid bipartisan majority, we delivered the most dramatic education reforms in a generation. We've increased funding, particularly for poor students. But for the first time, the Federal Government is asking the question, "Can our children read and write and add and subtract?" This administration is challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. We're raising the bar. We expect every child to read and write and add and subtract, and we expect every school to teach every child. The days of excuse-making are over in America. No child shall be left behind in this country.

We reorganized our Government and created the Department of Homeland Security to better protect our borders and ports and to safeguard the American people. We passed trade promotion authority to open up new markets for America's entrepreneurs and farmers and ranchers. We passed budget agreements to bring much-needed spending discipline to Washington, DC.

And last month, we completed the greatest advance in health care coverage for America's senior citizens since the founding

of Medicare. There's a lot of talk about Medicare in Washington over the years. The system got old and tired and stale. So we acted. The new Medicare law that I proudly signed will give older Americans the option of a prescription drug benefit and more control over their health care, so they can receive the modern medicine they deserve.

We've got a record of accomplishment. On issue after issue, this administration has acted on principle, has kept its word, and has made progress for the American people. And the Congress gets a lot of credit. I enjoy working with Congressman Shays and the Speaker of the House, Denny Hastert, Majority Leader Bill Frist. We're working hard to change the tone in Washington—there's just too much politics up there, too much needless politics, endless backbiting, zero-sum attitude—and the best way to do that is to work on behalf of the people and deliver results.

And the Congress gets a lot of credit for the successes over the last 3 years, and so do the people in my administration. I put together a fantastic group of Americans from all walks of life to serve the American people, people who came to Washington, DC, with one thing in mind, service to their country. Speaking about good people in my administration, our Nation has had no finer Vice President than Dick Cheney. Mother may have a second opinion. *[Laughter]*

In 3 years, we've come far, but our work is only beginning. I've set great goals worthy of a great nation. First, America is committed to expanding the realm of freedom and peace for our own security and for the benefit of the world. And second, in our own country, we will continue to work for a society which is prosperous and compassionate, so every citizen has a chance to realize the full promise of our land.

It is clear that the future of freedom and peace depend on the actions of America. This Nation is freedom's home and freedom's defender. We welcome this

charge of history, and we are keeping it. The war on terror continues. I wish I could tell you it didn't, but it does. The enemies of freedom are not idle, and neither are we. This country will not rest; we will not tire; we will not stop until this danger to civilization is removed.

We are confronting that danger in Iraq, where all people can be certain they will never again have to fear the brutality of Saddam Hussein. The Ba'athist holdouts largely responsible for the current violence now know there will be no return to corrupt power and privilege they once held. All Iraqis who have taken the side of freedom have taken the winning side.

We face terrorists who would rather go on killing the innocent than accept the rise of liberty in the Middle East. And there is a reason why, because, see, they know that the advance of freedom in Iraq would be a major defeat in the cause of terror. The collection of killers is trying to shake the will of America. America will never be intimidated by thugs or assassins.

We're aggressively after the terrorists in Iraq, defeating them there so we do not have to face them in our own cities. Other nations are helping in Iraq, because they understand a free and democratic and peaceful Iraq is in their interests. The whole world becomes more secure. And the Iraqi people are assuming more of their own defense and heading towards self-government. And these are not easy tasks. I recognize that, but I believe they're essential tasks. We will finish what we have begun, and America will win this essential victory in the war on terror.

We're working to oppose proliferation around the world. Last month, after talks with the United States and Great Britain, Libya voluntarily committed to disclose and dismantle all of its weapons of mass destruction programs. Leaders around the world now know with certainty, weapons of mass destruction do not bring influence or prestige; they bring isolation and other unwelcome consequences. Nations who

abandon the pursuit of these weapons will find an open path to better relations with the United States of America.

Our greatest security comes from the advance of human liberty, because free nations don't support terror, free nations do not attack their neighbors, free nations do not threaten the world with weapons of mass destruction. And Americans believe that freedom is the deepest need and hope of every human heart. I believe that freedom is the future of every nation. And I know, like you know, that freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God's gift to every man and woman in this world.

My administration also understands that unprecedented influence brings tremendous responsibilities. We have duties in this world, and when we see disease and starvation or hopeless poverty, we will not turn away. This strong and powerful Nation is a compassionate nation. And America now leads the world in bringing hope and medicines to millions of men and women and children suffering from AIDS. This incredible Nation of ours is leading the world in this very important work of human rescue.

We have challenges here at home, and our actions will prove that we're equal to those challenges. This administration understands entrepreneurship. We understand the vital role of risktaking. We will continue to promote a progrowth economic agenda so fellow citizens can find work.

We also understand the effects of frivolous and junk lawsuits on our society. For example, in health care, we need to cut down on these frivolous lawsuits which are running up the cost of medicine. People who have been harmed by a bad doc deserve their day in court, yet the system should not reward lawyers who are simply fishing for a rich settlement. Frivolous lawsuits drive up the cost of health care for every citizen, and they affect the Federal budget. Medical liability reform is a na-

tional issue which requires a national solution.

This administration has acted. We passed good legislation up to the Hill, and it was passed by the United States House of Representatives, for which I am grateful. It's stuck in the Senate. Perhaps you ought to notify your two United States Senators to get it unstuck. For the sake of a health care system that is available and affordable, we need medical liability reform now. No one has ever been healed by a frivolous lawsuit.

I have a responsibility to make sure the judicial system runs well, and I've met that duty. I have nominated superb men and women for the Federal courts, people who will interpret the law, not legislate from the bench. Some Members of the Senate are trying to keep my nominees off the bench by blocking up-or-down votes. Every judicial nominee deserves a fair hearing. It is time for some Members of the United States Senate to stop playing politics with American justice.

We've got more work to do, and the Congress needs to get me an energy bill. We need a bill which encourages more conservation. We need a bill which unleashes the technology of our country to be advanced in how we explore and use energy. But for the sake of economic security and for the sake of national security, this Nation must become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

A strong and prosperous nation must also be a compassionate nation. I will continue to advance what I call compassionate conservatism, which means we'll use the most innovative ideas to the task of helping our fellow citizens who hurt. There are still millions of men and women who want to end their dependence on Government and become independent through hard work. Congress must build on the success of welfare reform to bring training and, therefore, work into the lives of more of our fellow citizens. We need to make sure more Americans can serve their communities and

their country through vibrant citizen service programs. Congress needs to complete work on the Faith-Based Initiative.

You see, many of the problems that citizens face are problems of the heart, problems of addiction, problems that can't be solved necessarily by a Government program. And yet one of the great strengths of our country is the fact that we're a country of many faiths, Christian, Jewish, Muslim. And in many of those programs emanating out of those faiths come healing programs, programs that change people's lives. Our country should not fear faith-based programs. We ought to welcome faith-based programs, and Government ought to be their ally.

I believe part of being a compassionate society is one in which we encourage ownership. This administration will constantly strive to promote an ownership society in America. We want more people owning their own home. There's a minority homeownership gap in America that must be addressed. This administration is addressing it. We want more people owning and controlling their own retirement accounts. We want people owning and managing their own health care plans, like health savings accounts. We want more people owning their own small businesses, and the administration understands that. You see, we fully understand that when a person owns something, he or she has a vital stake in the future of this country.

A compassionate society is one in which people respect one another, respect their religious views, respect their opinions. It's a society in which people take responsibility for the decisions they make. The culture of this country is changing from one that has said, "If it feels good, just go ahead and do it," and, "If you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to a culture in which each of us understands we are responsible for the decisions we make in life. If you are lucky enough to be a mom or a dad, you are responsible for loving your child with all your heart. If you're worried

about the quality of the education in the community in which you live, you're responsible for doing something about it. If you are a CEO in corporate America, you're responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees. And in this new responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving our neighbor just like we would like to be loved ourselves.

The culture of service and responsibility is strong here in America. I really believe it's the great strength of our country. Two years ago, I started what's called the USA Freedom Corps to encourage people to love their neighbor, to do something to help somebody in need. And the response has been really strong, and I am grateful. Our faith-based programs and charities all across America are vibrant—integral part of our society. Policemen and firefighters and people who wear our Nation's uniform are reminding us what it means to sacrifice for something greater than ourselves. Once again, the children of America believe in heroes because they see them every day.

In these challenging times, the world has seen the resolve and courage of America. I've been privileged to see the compassion and the character of the American people. All the tests of the last 3 years have come to the right nation. We're a strong country, and we use that strength to defend the peace. We're an optimistic country, confident in ourselves and in ideals bigger than ourselves. Abroad, we seek to lift up whole nations by spreading freedom. At home, we seek to lift up lives by spreading opportunity to every corner of America. This is the history—this is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it and know that for our country, the best days lie ahead.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:10 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Debbie Stapleton, master of ceremonies and second cousin of the President,

and her husband, Craig; Rick Lazio, chief executive officer, Financial Services Forum; Lt. Gov. M. Jodi Rell of Connecticut; his relatives Jonathan J. Bush and his wife, Jody, and Prescott Bush, Jr., and his wife, Beth;

and Hebert J. Shepardson, State chairman, Charles L. Glazer, national committeeman, and Jo McKenzie, national committee-woman, Connecticut State Central Committee, Republican Party.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Economists and an Exchange With Reporters

January 30, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming. I just had a very interesting discussion with some of our Nation's finest economists about the state of our economy and how we can work together to make sure that the economy continues to grow. Today we received news that indicates that the economy is strong and getting stronger. Fourth quarter growth in 2003 was at 4 percent.

We also discussed ways for Congress to make sure we sustain growth. We need to make sure the tax cuts are permanent. If Congress doesn't make the tax cuts permanent, they will have raised taxes on the working people of this country at the exact wrong time. We need to make sure we continue to be a nation which trades freely. We need to make sure that we have less regulation. We need to do things that are wise to control the cost of medicine without nationalizing health care.

We had a really good discussion. I want to thank you all for coming. These economists are optimistic about our future, and so am I. And the American people can know that we continue to work hard to make sure this economy is vibrant and robust and strong so our fellow citizens can find good jobs.

I'll be glad to answer a couple of questions. Scott [Scott Lindlaw, Associated Press], have you got one today, perhaps?

Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction

Q. Yes, sir, I do. Thanks, Mr. President. Senator McCain, David Kay, among many

others, say it's time for an independent investigation into weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and intelligence. Why resist this kind of inquiry now, when your own weapons inspector says it's needed?

The President. I want the American people to know that I too want to know the facts. I want to be able to compare what the Iraqi Survey Group has found with what we thought prior to going into Iraq.

One thing is for certain, one thing we do know from Mr. Kay's testimony as well as from the years of intelligence that we had gathered, is that Saddam Hussein was a danger. He was a growing danger. And given the circumstances of September the 11th, this country went to the United Nations and said, "Saddam Hussein is a danger. Let us work together to get him to disarm." He was defiant. He ignored the request of the international community, and this country led a coalition to remove him. We dealt with the danger, and as a result, the world is a better place and a more peaceful place, and the Iraqi people are free. And a free Iraq is in this Nation's national interest. A free Iraq will bring a much-needed change in a part of the world that has fostered terror.

Caren [Caren Bohan, Reuters].

Q. Are you dead set against it?

The President. Caren.

Q. Ruling it out?

The President. I want to know the facts. Caren.

Q. Are you against the idea of a new—